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Chapter 11

Rilpada the Seer

AUTOBIOGRAPHY *

February 1, 1939

When I was about eight years old, my mother and father quarreled. [59] Then my father went to live with his second wife, Koltaliera. My mother cried because just then her older sister [classificatory] died in Atimelang. She cried very hard. I asked, "Why is this? I am still small, and my father goes to stay with his other wife, and you are crying for a dead kin? What shall we roast for her death feast?" I took my bow and arrow and went to Lenmasang. Lonmale's pig was in the pen and I shot it. His son Simon threw stones at me and wounded my knee. Alonmale said, "Now you have wounded my uncle, so he must take the pig and roast it." The pig was worth a Piki [5-rupish moko]. So I took it to Old Dikimpe and Fanleti carried it to Atimelang to roast. That night Fanleti brought home the ham, neck, and back. Before we had eaten it, Lonmale came to complain. So we paid twenty cents, a broken gong worth a rupish, and ten corn bundles of forty ears each. Then Lonmale said, "The corn is for me to eat, but I shall count the money and the broken gong as a dowry payment. Next time ask me before you shoot and I will give you a pig."

When I was about six or seven, I went to sleep in Alofe's house. We slept close to each other. His mother was cooking. She upset the pot and hot water spilled on my knee. It swelled and the skin peeled off. Father thought I would die if he didn't doctor me, so mother carried [75?] me down to the ravine and father put algae on my wound. I urinated [27?] in father's hand as he held me. Father then carried me in his scarf up to Puorkaivi, where he hunted rats. He shot two and gave them to me. He dug tubers, roasted them with the rats, and we ate. Then father carried me up to Old Atimelang. The people there were buying a Fehawa moko and were giving a dance for it that night. Father went to the dance, and I cried hard for him.

When my leg was well and I was twelve or thirteen, I went to Dikimpe. There I joined the people who were having their teeth blackened. We all went to hunt rats. One day I alone shot fifteen, the next day I got ten, and on the third day fifteen again. I got so many I lost [?] track of them. I smoked them dry and saved them. There were three

* Rilpada's dreams were collected separately and are given in a separate section.

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159 girls and fifteen boys. We all slept at the field house. [I asked about intercourse. She denied it.] We slept boys and girls together. Marsata and Padalani exchanged shawls and slept side by side. I slept alongside Kolata [girl]; then Maitama [boy] slept next to me. Then there were Fuilang [girl], Djetlang [boy], and Maimakani [boy]. Only those two exchanged shawls. [In telling this she had a more animated expression than usual. She seemed to enjoy this whole tale and laughed once or twice.]

When we were there, Fanma talked all kinds of funny ways. He said that he was a seer and that his familiar spirit was rising in him. [She laughed.] So we all began laughing. We sat up and took out the dye strips from our mouths. We said, "Now we have to go dance [supposed to be bad for tooth dyeing]." We said, "We all have to go, and whoever stays here will be got by the evil spirit of Alurkolohu." We set out. Maimakani wanted to come too. He was a small boy who was with us to mind the fire. We told him he had to stay behind and guard the house so no one would come and get the smoked rats, which the boys were saving for the final feast. He went back and we all went on to Alurkowati to dance. We came back early in the morning, put the dye strips back in our mouths, and slept. In the afternoon we woke and said, "Oh, we haven't yet cooked anything for the boys. We had better go get some peas and corn." So we did. The boys hunted rats. They shot two or three. We girls ate the hearts and stomachs. The
● [251] boys smoked the meat to keep it until the final feast. After the final feast we all went back to our own houses. For a month after that we drank only through bamboo tubes. The older people told us we had to do that to protect our teeth. After that they said we could eat hard things, drink as we wished, and not have to be careful any more.

[Pause.] Three days ago after leaving here, I went to cut weeds. There was a thick dense patch that I came to after I had cut one pile. I slashed into it, and then I saw I had cut a snake in half, so I called Atafani to come and finish killing it. [She told this as though it were a very exciting event.] Later it rained very hard and Atafani, who was mending the field house, picked up our baskets and took them into the house. We all went in to sit down. There was a spate and land slumped. Kolangkaliets's garden was destroyed by sliding earth and stones. We said, "Oh, this is our corn now. If the corn were still standing we would not dare take it, but now that it has been knocked over we can take some. It will only dry up if it is left here." So we took enough to eat right then. That evening we all came home, and

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the next day we all went back again, seven of us, to help cut Kolfani's garden. 159[K]

[Question.] This year I have two gardens of corn and one of rice. The two cornfields I share, one with Kawaimani and one with Maliemai. The rice I have alone. One field is right here near the village, and the other two are just beyond Faramasang. The field I have near Ruulkameng I didn't plant. I am only now cutting it for sun corn with the help of Kolfani and Kolang. This last garden my father gave me; from mother I got the other three. Kawaimani received a large field [*pining*] from father. Mother gave her three gardens also. This year I am storing my corn with Tilamau [a kinswoman she called mother]. Last year and also the year before, I stored with Kolangkalieta. I cannot store in Kawaimani's house because it has no rat disks. Kawaimani stores her food with Tilamau every year. We give Tilamau a small corn bundle as a present, not pay. Tilamau also stores in her own loft, so there are three of us with food there. Tilamau stacks her corn on one side of the two central posts in the loft; then I and Kawaimani also have our stacks. So each person has her own pile. 159[K] 159[K] 251

March 23, 1939

[No dreams. The usual block about starting. I offered no help. Finally the interpreter told her to talk about anything, and he listed many local activities. Her face brightened and she poured out this tale at great length.] 159[K]

When I was seven or eight, Kawaimani was already married to Maleta. [Note the contradiction of her statement on March 16.] Mother said we should go to Talmang to make a garden. We were to share it with Maleta and the mother of Lonalurka. So we three went. Kawaimani stayed here with Falepang because she had a bad leg wound. So we went to Talmang and cut weeds. At that time we went back and forth. Then when it was time to plant, we went there to stay. When the corn was about eight inches high, Lonalurka said we should go to hunt for bamboo grubs. I, mother, and she went to Bunghieng to hunt for them. That evening we brought them home and said we would cook them. I said, "I don't know how. Perhaps old people do, but I don't." So Lonalurka said, "I'll do it." She made a fire and put the grubs in a young bamboo tube and put the tube near the fire. When they were roasted we ate them with corn. Then a big rain and spate came. Maleta said he was going down the river to catch crabs and shrimps that were washed down with the spate. He got many. He [322] [352]